

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**EAST MEETS WEST: A COMBINED APPROACH TO STUDYING WAR AND  
STRATEGY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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In a world with no true balance of power, where the United States, a unipolar military power, dominates the world stage, it can be argued that all future wars involving the United States will be asymmetrical. If the irregular, unconventional, and asymmetric are today's convention, we need to reexamine and broaden our familiarity with components from both the Western and Eastern schools of war theory. Throughout its history, the United States has relied largely on Western, European-based war theories (specifically, Clausewitz and, to a lesser extent, Jomini), for the foundations of its war strategy. Components of these Western theories are still important to the strategist. These theories do not, however, focus adequate attention on the unconventional, "small war" operations we face now and in the future.

This paper, examines two of the Western theories in light of the new world situation, examining both their enduring concepts as well as their shortcomings in today's globalized landscape. It further examines the current (and future) world landscapes, and how these changed and changing landscapes make it critical to reexamine how we view and study strategy and war. Finally, it examines the applicability of Sun Tzu's writings, which are essential to a 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding of war. It proposes that our unconventional world requires a holistic, unconventional, and indirect approach to war theory. While there is still value in a study of the Western masters, the study and application of Sun Tzu should also be a primary focus to strategists and planners. To be well armed for today's security threats, the modern strategist must be well versed in both the relevant concepts from the Western classics as well as the enduring flexibility offered by Sun Tzu.



## EAST MEETS WEST: A COMBINED APPROACH TO STUDYING WAR AND STRATEGY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

*"Irregular combat is more typical of contemporary conflict than are set-piece conventional battles."*

Richard K. Betts<sup>1</sup>

We live in a world with no true balance of power, where the United States, a unipolar military power, dominates the world stage. Some argue that all future wars involving the United States will be asymmetrical. If Richard Betts' quotation listed above is correct, and the irregular, unconventional, and asymmetric are today's convention, we need to reexamine and broaden our familiarity with components from both the Western and Eastern schools of war theory. Throughout its history, the United States has relied largely on Western, European-based war theories (specifically, Clausewitz and, to a lesser extent, Jomini), for the foundations of its war strategy. Components of these Western theories are still important to the strategist. Western theory, as exemplified by both Clausewitz and Jomini, still has great historical and practical value to strategists. These theories do not, however, focus adequate attention on the unconventional, "small war" operations we face now and will continue to face in the future.

In this paper, I will examine two Western theories in light of the new world situation, examining both their enduring concepts as well as their shortcomings in today's globalized landscape. I will analyze Clausewitz's concepts of the paradoxical trinity, culminating points, and fog and friction, examining their current utility. Next, I will look at the concept of center of gravity, which is less applicable in a world of asymmetric threats. I will also address some key tenets of Jomini as well, assessing decisive points and lines of operation both as intended by Jomini as well as how we currently use them in our strategic planning. Next, I will briefly examine the current (and future) world landscapes, and how these ever-changing landscapes make it critical to reexamine how we view and study strategy and war. Finally, I will then examine the applicability of Sun Tzu's writings, which are essential to my own understanding of war. I propose that our unconventional world requires a holistic, unconventional, and indirect approach to war theory. While there is still value in a study of the Western masters, the study and application of Sun Tzu should also be a primary focus to strategists and planners. To be well armed for today's security threats, the modern strategist must be well versed in both the relevant concepts from the Western classics as well as the enduring flexibility offered by Sun Tzu.

*"War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."*

Carl Von Clausewitz<sup>2</sup>

Clausewitz: The Foundation of America's War Theory:

In *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America (1815-1945)*, Christopher Bassford asserts, "By the early 1990s, Clausewitz's theories and concepts had come to permeate Anglo-American writing on military and national security topics."<sup>3</sup> Bassford lists numerous examples detailing American military and government focus (and, perhaps, fixation) on Clausewitz. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, in both nationally-recognized war commentaries (Harry Summers), as well as in national-level policy (the Weinberger Doctrine), clear references to Clausewitz's theory are evident.<sup>4</sup> There are some fundamental immutables contained in *On War* that are still relevant and applicable to the modern strategist. I will briefly discuss three of Clausewitz's concepts that continue to be both practical and applicable to our understanding of war.

The first concept from *On War* still vital to our understanding of war is Clausewitz's commentary about the linkage of the nature, the purpose, and the conduct of war. "Clausewitz called this linkage a paradoxical trinity with three aspects: the people, the commander and his army, and the government."<sup>5</sup> Specifically important is an understanding of the predominance that national policy must assert over the military. Understanding war as a continuation of policy using other means and the roles of both the military and the government is critical for today's strategist. Clausewitz had the foresight to understand this unique relationship requires both an understanding of statecraft by the military, as well as an understanding of the military by the statesman. "The stronger the relationship between the nation's senior military commanders and the government, the more effective we [the United States] have been at using the military instrument of foreign policy to achieve national political objectives."<sup>6</sup> This remains true today in this age of asymmetrical warfare.

Clausewitz's concept of the culminating point still applies today. The Department of Defense (DoD) dictionary defines culminating point as "the point at which a force no longer has the capability to continue its form of operations, offense or defense."<sup>7</sup> For the strategist, this concept takes on an even greater meaning than this narrow modern definition infers. It is critical that both the government and the military understand the impact of the culminating point on the military force as well as on the policy objective. Both general and statesman must be able to recognize and react to the political and military culminating points encountered when facing an enemy. The government must issue clear policy guidance, and adapt (or amend) that guidance

as the military force reaches its own culminating point or pushes the opponent toward his. A successful conflict termination hinges on early identification of and planning for these culminating points. Applying this term in a broader sense makes this concept as important strategically as it is tactically. Both the tactical and strategic applications of Clausewitz's description of the culminating point are still critical to our understanding of war.

No concepts remain more applicable to 21<sup>st</sup> Century war than Clausewitz's understanding of fog and friction, "friction referring to physical impediments to military action, fog to the commander's lack of clear information."<sup>8</sup> The U.S. military has restated this fundamental concept in its much-used catchphrase, "volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous." Clausewitz wrote that actions on the battlefield happen "in a kind of twilight, which, like fog or moonlight, often tends to make things seem grotesque and larger than they really are."<sup>9</sup> Despite numerous technological and communications innovations since this concept was described in *On War*, fog and friction still plague both the modern battlefield as well as modern policy makers, and must be accounted for by strategists and planners. The commander still relies on intuition and experience to arrive at the correct path through that fog. "Generals are always trying to figure out exactly what's going to happen next – they're reaching for a perfect transparent intelligence. But there is no such thing."<sup>10</sup> "Technology has lifted some of the fog but can never eliminate it."<sup>11</sup> As long as we have war, we will have fog and friction, and these critical concepts need to be in the lexicon of every strategist and planner.

The paradoxical trinity, the culminating point, and fog and friction are only three examples of lessons we must still learn from Clausewitz. The overall utility of his theory is more limited in today's world than it was in his own, however. During Clausewitz's time, the nation state reigned supreme. He had no need to address the non-state actors that pose perhaps the greatest threat to security today, and he paid little or no attention to small wars, insurgencies, or any similar warfare from which we can draw lessons. As Michael Forsyth points out, war itself has changed drastically. "War encompasses insurrection, terrorist acts, and criminal acts. With some exceptions...war is any violent act aimed at producing a change in the sociopolitical status quo."<sup>12</sup> Clausewitz was generally a proponent of a direct approach. In his mind, combat was everything. But if you accept the premise that our vastly superior military will not encounter a peer force-on-force threat, that all threats we will face in the foreseeable future will be asymmetrical, you must look elsewhere for additional relevant information on an indirect approach.

Another hazard of over-reliance on Clausewitz's writings lies in remaining tied (doctrinally) to concepts that lose their applicability as the world landscape changes. A good

example of this is the continuing fixation at the strategic planning level on identifying a single, all-encompassing “center of gravity.” Clausewitz, the originator of the concept, defined center of gravity as “the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies must be directed.”<sup>13</sup> Joint Publication 1-02, The Department of Defense Dictionary, defines Centers of Gravity as “those characteristics, capabilities, or localities from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight.”<sup>14</sup> Taken a step further, the Army places great emphasis on identifying and targeting centers of gravity. FM 100-5, the operations bible for at least two generations of Army leadership, translates Clausewitz’s passage as follows:

The concept of centers of gravity is key to all operational design. . . . As with any complex organism, some components are more vital than others to the smooth and reliable operation of the whole. If these are damaged or destroyed, their loss unbalances the entire structure, producing a cascading deterioration of cohesion and effectiveness which may result in complete failure.<sup>15</sup>

In a more recent edition of 100-5, the discussion of Center of Gravity goes on to further emphasize:

The essence of operational art lies in being able to mass effects against the enemy’s main source of power—his center of gravity, which he seeks to protect.<sup>16</sup>

One must consider this guidance in light of the current world environment, which will be discussed in detail later in this paper. Does an asymmetric enemy truly have a single center of gravity, against which successful attack will serve to topple him? Does Al Qaeda? Does China? Or, are there many separate decisive points you must target and strike (either kinetically, non-kinetically, or both), in order to gain your overall strategic objective? In his 1998 article “Centers of Gravity Are a Myth,” Colonel Mark Cancian argued that, while the general concept of a center of gravity is a useful (and comfortable) starting point for strategic planners, it is no panacea. “Unfortunately, it [a center of gravity] is often a mirage. These concepts may be good in theory, but they rarely exist in the real world in a way useful for military planners...the problem is that centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities just are not there.”<sup>17</sup> So, while the world changes daily, flattening into a “web” of ever-changing decisive points against which planners should be constantly focusing and refocusing, an over-reliance on the time-worn concept of center of gravity focuses them instead on something that, in the minds of many, does not even exist in a asymmetrical, post-Westphalian world.



*"There exists a small number of fundamental principles of war, which could not be deviated from without danger, and the application of which, on the contrary, has been in almost all time crowned with success."*

Baron Antoine-Henri de Jomini, *The Present Theory of War and its Utility*<sup>18</sup>

#### Jomini: The Baron and His Legacy:

Like Clausewitz, Jomini has had significant influence on the evolution of American war theory. From the decades immediately prior to the American Civil War to today, Jomini has had a huge following for his mathematical, orderly approach to war theory.<sup>19</sup> Jomini's Fundamental Principles still permeate our current Military Deliberate Decision Making Process (MDMP).<sup>20</sup> Our focus on identifying decisive points during our planning analysis is a reflection of one of Jomini's most enduring concepts, one still applicable to 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare. Jomini defines decisive points as "...all those which are capable of exercising a marked influence either upon the result of a campaign or upon a single enterprise."<sup>21</sup> Certainly, military and governmental strategists at all levels are currently wracking their collective brains to identify and target decisive points that could have an impact on the Global War on Terror. Similarly, Jomini's description of lines of operation is still useful both as a planning and instructional tool. "Field Manual 3-0 devotes large sections of chapters 5 and 6 to this major Jominian concept."<sup>22</sup>

Although Jomini may rival even Clausewitz in the number of his modern critics, Thomas Huber argues that his enduring concepts of "...lines of operation, decisive points, concentration of force against weakness, annihilation of the enemy force, the importance of the offensive, surprise, and the potentially decisive role of logistics" are still pertinent and much used today.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, Huber masterfully sums up Jomini's shortcomings vis-à-vis the modern battlefield.

"There is no treatment of politics, no strategy, no technological change, no strategic resource base, no psychology, no people's war, no adversary, and indeed no unexpected adversity in Jomini's work. The operator must remember that while the Principles of War are an essential tool, they are likely to be only one of the many tools he needs for victory."<sup>24</sup>

This is truer today than it ever has been.

While the concept of lines of operation is still used and is still useful, it should be noted that this concept has recently evolved into a much broader meaning than was envisioned originally by the Baron. Jomini saw lines of operation in a strictly geometric context. His characterization of lines of operation (or "LOOs" as they are called today) was simply as "way points", and when tied to lines of communication (or LOCs), allowed the commander to retain the initiative in movement of his own forces or attacks on his enemy's. Today, while the

Department of Defense still has yet to update its narrower, geometric definition for LOOs, the concept is much more broadly defined in the field.<sup>25</sup> In his preparation and planning for Operation Iraqi Freedom, General Tommy Franks helped redefine the concept of LOOs by broadening the term's use to include all of the strategic axes along which the friendly forces should proceed in order to secure victory.

“As I thought about a potential operation in Iraq, a number of obvious *lines of operation* presented themselves. One was KINETICS: OPERATIONAL FIRES- the firing of TLAMs and air strikes from manned bombers, as well as close air support from fighter-bombers and AC-130 Spectres, and eventually Marine and Army helicopter gunships. Another line was OPERATIONAL MANEUVER- Conventional ground forces. Another was SPECIAL FORCES. And there were other important lines, both political and diplomatic: HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, INFORMATION OPERATIONS, DECEPTION.”<sup>26</sup>

It is now common practice to associate LOOs with all of the actions and their associated effects that commanders at all levels determine to be decisive for mission success. In this way, Jomini's original concept has been updated and continues to be relevant, even if it has been amended to account for our changing world situation.

*“...I remarked it was time that they went back to Sun Tzu, since in that one short book was embodied almost as much about the fundamentals of strategy and tactics as I had covered in more than twenty books. In short, Sun Tzu was the best short introduction to the study of warfare, and no less valuable for constant reference in extending study of the subject.”*

B.H. Liddell Hart<sup>27</sup>

#### Sun Tzu: The East Meets the West:

While strategists must certainly continue to arm themselves with theories from the classical Western writers, Hart warns it is dangerous to stop there. This is where I propose East must meet West. The Eastern theory of war reflected in the ancient writings of Sun Tzu is perhaps more relevant now than at any other time in history. We live in a world of constant conflict between the “haves” and the “have nots.” We live in a world of “all olive trees and no Lexuses.”<sup>28</sup> We live in a world where information, ideologies, religion, water rights, ecology, agriculture, and economics all play unprecedented roles in international relations and provide unlimited opportunities for our potential adversaries. Finally, we live in a world where potential enemies recognize they cannot confront us directly. They must employ an indirect approach. To successfully ensure security, we, too must understand and employ an indirect approach as was done before successfully outside of the Western world. Our theory of war must be ultimately flexible to the many situations in which the military can be employed. It must describe

a general framework of concepts and precepts that can be applied to asymmetrical, unconventional foes. It must not be absolute. And it must allow us to see both ourselves and our potential opponents in realistic terms. The theory of war embodied by Sun Tzu's writings is the most applicable for today, given that our current and foreseeable enemies must take an indirect approach against us. The reasoning for this is three-fold: (1) Unconventional warriors have successfully employed and evolved the indirect approach. This is unlikely to change; (2) Our major enemy in the Global War on Terror, Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, employs the basic tenets of Sun Tzu. In order to defeat Al Qaeda and maintain our security, we must also; (3) Eastern theory reflected in the writings of Sun Tzu focuses on intelligence and knowledge of our enemy, and best facilitates the flexibility required for the broad range of types of war and military operations other than war that we will most likely encounter for the foreseeable future.

A brief examination of Sun Tzu's writings and the major tenets of his theory will help identify some specific areas of applicability given today's world landscape. Sun Tzu lived and wrote during the time of the Warring States in China, during the period of the fourth century BC. While much is not known about Sun Tzu (or Master Sun as he is commonly referred to), his writings have been influential throughout much of the Eastern world, and increasingly in the Western world as well. The Western world gained its first glimpse of Master Sun through an 18<sup>th</sup> century French translation of Master Sun's *The Art of War* by a Jesuit priest who had served as a missionary to Peking.<sup>29</sup> Master Sun's precepts contained in *The Art of War* consist of 395 "lessons," or major concepts, on war, the military, the enemy, politics, and the interrelationships therewith. In the thirteen chapters of *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu covers the gamut of human endeavor vis-à-vis warfare. His major topics and themes are Estimates, Waging War, Offensive Strategy, Dispositions, Energy, Weaknesses and Strengths, Maneuvers, The Nine Variables, Marches, Terrain, The Nine Varieties of Ground, Attack by Fire, and Employment of Secret Agents. Samuel Griffith provides the best short overview of Sun Tzu's basic philosophy in his 1963 translation and interpretation of *The Art of War*:

"The opening verse of Sun Tzu's classic is the basic clue to his philosophy. War is a grave concern of the state; it must be thoroughly studied. Here is recognition-and for the first time-that armed strife is not a transitory aberration but a recurrent conscious act and therefore susceptible to rational analysis. Sun Tzu believed that the moral strength and intellectual faculty of man were decisive in war, and if these were properly applied, war could be waged with certain success. Never to be undertaken thoughtlessly or recklessly, war was to be preceded by measures designed to make it easy to win. The master conqueror frustrated his enemy's plans and broke up his alliances. He created cleavages between sovereign and minister, superiors and inferiors, commanders and subordinates. His spies and agents were active everywhere, gathering information, sowing dissension, and nurturing subversion. The enemy was isolated and demoralized; his will to resist broken. Thus without battle his army was conquered, his cities taken

and his state overthrown. Only when the enemy could not be overcome by these means was there recourse to armed force, which was to be applied so that victory was gained:

- (a) in the shortest possible time;
- (b) at the least possible cost in lives and effort;
- (c) with infliction on the enemy of the fewest possible casualties.<sup>30</sup>

Now, armed with a baseline knowledge of who Sun Tzu was as well as with the major tenets of his theories, it is time to bring him into the modern world landscape. Throughout the history of 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century asymmetrical warfare, insurgent leaders have applied and evolved these tenets of Sun Tzu, and have been successful. There are many examples of this. In *The Sling and the Stone*, Thomas X. Hammes offers several such examples in his definition of Fourth Generation Warfare.<sup>31</sup> Fourth Generation War (or 4GW) is how Hammes describes the politico-military insurgencies and uprisings that plagued the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and continue to plague us today. He traces the history of these 4GW conflicts from Mao Zedong and the Chinese Peoples' Revolution to Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, and includes commentary on the Sandinistas, the First and Second Intifadas, and a description of current strategy and tactics used by Al Qaeda. In every case, the common thread is clear. These are asymmetrical conflicts of ideas, each building on the successes of the ones that preceded it. J.A.H. Futterman argues that this is nothing new, and that this 4GW is merely a reflection of Sun Tzu's teachings.<sup>32</sup> In each example noted above, much less well-armed forces defeat superior forces through oblique (indirect) strategies, focusing on sound intelligence, consistent and resonating ideological themes. The weaker force enters into actual combat only at times and places of their (not their opponent's) choosing.

Mao Zedong was an expert on the writings and theory of Sun Tzu. Mao's writings seem to be direct paraphrasing of Sun Tzu.

"When guerrillas engage a stronger enemy, they withdraw when he advances; harass him when he stops; strike him when he is weary; pursue him when he withdraws. In guerilla strategy, the enemy's rear, flanks, and other vulnerable spots are his vital points, and there he must be harassed, attacked, dispersed, exhausted and annihilated."<sup>33</sup>

Both Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap display Sun Tzu's theories of deception and the indirect approach. Ho led a technologically-inferior force to victory against both the French and the Americans, extending the battlefield from the conventional (soldiers and weapons) to the enemy's will. He robbed his opponents of their national and international support and won. The Sandinistas also seem to have learned from Sun Tzu. Their avoidance of decisive, overmatched battles as well as their uses of deception, political propaganda, media manipulation, and manipulation of religious sentiment allowed them to overthrow the country's

government. They did this without a pitched battle, an organized army, or the use of major military force. In the First Intifada, the Palestinians used primitive means (such as rock throwing at police and military forces in the Demilitarized Zones) to eventually accomplish their political objective, the replacement of the Likud party by the Labor Party in Israel. They did this without a force-on-force assault, an organized military force, or modern weapons. They understood and applied an indirect approach. The Second Intifada was characterized by employing escalating violence (such as suicide bombers) at the right time and place to avoid Israel's strong military targets in favor of its weaker civilian targets.

In every example noted, one can find evidence of Sun Tzu's theory applied to successful strategies by seemingly weaker, less organized opponents. Without an understanding of this Eastern, indirect approach to war, you can easily miss the parallels and find yourself reacting to the enemy instead of anticipating his next move. A close study of these conflicts in light of Sun Tzu's writings can aid us in our preparation for future asymmetrical threats.

In the current Global War on Terror, we can find another application of Sun Tzu's theories. Many parallels to Sun Tzu can be seen in Al Qaeda's strategy, perhaps the best being the flexible (and adaptive) use of psychological operations and propaganda, all falling under the general heading of "deception." In his book *Imperial Hubris*, Mike Scheuer traces the evolution of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda's "grievances" (or messages) employed throughout the last 20 years.<sup>34</sup> These grievance themes have allowed Al Qaeda to quietly recruit and organize successfully, and build (or adjust) a base of support as conditions and situations changed. These themes have evolved over time and call for a wide range of evolving actions.

- Against US support of Israel's domination of the Palestinians.
- Against US troops on the Arabian Peninsula
- Against US occupation of Afghanistan (and still later, Iraq)
- Against US and Western support for Russia, India, and China
- Against US pressure on Arab governments to keep oil prices low
- Most recently, against US and Western support of "corrupt" Arab governments against Muslim Fundamentalists

Just having the correct messages is certainly not enough. Effective use of these messages requires both organization and an indirect approach to disseminate them to the right target audiences, while simultaneously gathering intelligence about their success. In order to combat this campaign of messages, we can turn to Sun Tzu's works. As we saw above, *The Art of War* has thirteen chapters, all of which describe intelligence operations to some extent, and one of which (Chapter 13) focuses exclusively on intelligence and spying. As Sun Tzu writes, "Secret

operations (intelligence) are the essence of warfare—it is what armies depend upon in their every move.”<sup>35</sup> Combating the enemy’s themes and grievances is critical to undermining his international support, denying him his bases of operations and safe havens, and ultimately winning the war of ideas that confronts us.

It must also be mentioned that another emerging potential adversary, China, still ascribes to and utilizes Sun Tzu’s theories in their continuing economic and military development. We have already seen the evidence of Sun Tzu’s influence on Mao and the Chinese Communist revolutionaries. In its 1999 compilation of strategic studies of the Chinese Military, The United States Army Strategic Studies Institute detailed many instances where current Chinese geopolitical and military strategy still draw directly from the teachings of Master Sun. The Chinese concept of Comprehensive National Power (CNP), for example, which details the synergy and interconnectivity of all sources and resources from which China must support its regional and worldwide expansionist objectives, is drawn directly from statecraft and strategy lessons contained in Sun Tzu’s writings.

According to Wu Chunqui, calculating CNP can aid a nation not just for war, but also to “coordinate a political and diplomatic offensive, to psychologically disintegrate the enemy forces and subdue them.” Wu states, “Victory without war does not mean that there is not any war at all. The wars one must fight are political wars, economic wars, science and technology wars, diplomatic wars, etc. To sum up in a word, it is a war of Comprehensive National Power.”<sup>36</sup>

Certainly, we can see Sun Tzu’s influence over even this recent example of the template for Chinese strategy. As is the case with the non-state, Al Qaeda terrorist web, the Chinese are inextricably tied to Master Sun, and the United States must firmly grasp Sun Tzu’s teachings in order to understand the emerging threat China potentially poses to United States’ security. In both cases, we must first “know ourselves,” understand our own strengths and weaknesses (risks and opportunities). We must then thoroughly “know our enemy,” (our opponent), our opponent’s ideology, his strengths, his weaknesses, his motivation, and his resources. We must apply our own information and intelligence campaigns. We must exploit all of our own national power (across the spectrum of diplomacy, information, military power, and economic might) to best leverage our own opportunities and minimize our own risks, while maximizing the risks to our opponent. To a student of Master Sun, none of this sounds new.

#### Changing Times Call for New Solutions...or Revisiting Time-Proven Solutions:

For over fifty years, the Western world faced a single, monolithic threat, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). This threat focused all our military plans, programs, and strategies. It focused the resources and energies of all free countries toward a known, “reliable”

enemy. Combating that threat required technologies, organizations, and strategies we, as Americans, were very comfortable with. The enemy was tangible. We could see him on satellite images. We could track his submarines. We could array our forces geometrically to counter his. We could apply the Clausewitzian concept of center of gravity and be mindful of Jominian lines of operation and communication. That single enemy has been replaced by a variety of threats that afford us no such comfort. War in the future is much more likely to be caused by the internal disintegration of a smaller state, the threat to U.S. economic interests, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, disputes over water rights, agricultural failure, ecological crisis, or the influences of religious fundamentalism. This will result in deployments and engagements that span the entire spectrum of military involvement, including Peacekeeping Operations, Stability and Support Operations, Counterinsurgencies, and perhaps even preemptive strikes against terrorist organizations or individuals threatening U.S. civilians.

Today's variety of threats requires unprecedented levels of flexibility. More than anything else, preserving security today requires better knowledge of foes and potential foes. Sun Tzu wrote that the acme of war is winning without military combat. To accomplish this ideal, both military and governmental strategists must acquire better intelligence about the enemy and act on that intelligence wisely. Unfortunately, America focuses mainly on internal capabilities; what capability do we have to directly counter our enemy? Study of Sun Tzu shows us it is no longer that simple. Ten divisions organized into 43 Brigade Combat Teams may no longer be an algorithm for victory. We must heed Sun Tzu's guidance on gaining information on the enemy in a way in which we are currently least adept; the employment of human intelligence. We must be more adaptive, and understand the world is less "solid" and more "fluid" than it once was. Instead of the Russian Bear, we now face the insurgent ghost. To defeat the ghost, we must first understand him as he understands us, and apply all of the elements of our national power against the weaknesses that we uncover. None of this is new. All of it can be found in the writings of Sun Tzu.

#### Conclusion:

Sun Tzu has his shortcomings. Many readers find him simplistic and overly general. Others, like Douglas McCready, point to Sun Tzu's assertion that political rulers should leave strategy and tactics entirely to the generals. Sun Tzu proposes that generals can (and should) disregard their political leaders when the military situation requires.<sup>37</sup> These are valid concerns, especially in a free society that values civilian control of the military as one of its founding principles. This only reinforces the argument that today's strategists must be well-grounded in

both the Eastern theory as well as in Western theories such as Clausewitz and Jomini. The time for simple solutions or dogmatic approaches to any single volume or writer has passed. The world is much too complex. The Chief of Staff of the Army challenges us to be 21<sup>st</sup> century pentathletes. I contend that we must first be renaissance thinkers, armed with the very best from both the Atlantic and the Pacific, as well as our own modern day strategic thinkers. Sun Tzu is not the answer for every question. This age requires flexibility of thought, exploitation of intelligence, and an indirect approach in our war theory. Sun Tzu fills the indirect approach gaps left by the Western theorists. Given the recent past and the discernible future, knowledge of Sun Tzu will be critical to both understanding and defeating our potential enemies. "...political and military leaders of stronger states [such as the United States] should become familiar with Sun Tzu because if they will not be using his ideas, they must be ready to protect themselves against others who will."<sup>38</sup>

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" *International Security*, Vol. 25, (Fall 2000), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*: trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1976), 75.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 197.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>5</sup> COL Larry D. New, "Clausewitz's Theory: On War and Its Application Today," *Airpower Journal* (Fall 1996): 78.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Defense Dictionary, "Culminating Point," 31 August 2005; available at <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/data/c/01438.html>; Internet; accessed 21 September 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Eugenia C. Kiesling, "On War Without the Fog", *Military Review* (September-October 2001); available at <http://www.leavenworth.army.mil/milrev/English/SepOct01/keisling.htm>; Internet; accessed 24 September 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Howard and Paret, 140.

<sup>10</sup> Keith Epstein, "Fog Obscuring U.S. Military Vision," *Tampa Tribune*, 7 March 2002; available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2002/020307-attack01.htm>; Internet; accessed 21 September 2005.



<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> MAJ Michael Forsyth, "Finesse: A Short Theory of War," *Military Review*, (July-August 2004): 17.

<sup>13</sup> Clausewitz, pages 595 and 596.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Defense Dictionary, "Centers of Gravity", 31 August 2005; available at <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/data/c/01438.html>; Internet; accessed 21 January 2006.

<sup>15</sup> FM 100-5, *Operations*, 1986 edition, page 69, "Key Concepts of Operational Design."

<sup>16</sup> FM 100-5, *Operations*, 1993 edition, page 69, "Planning and executing Operations."

<sup>17</sup> Colonel Mark Cancian, "Centers of Gravity are a Myth", *Proceedings*, (September 1998); available at <http://www.usni.org/Proceedings/articles98/PROcancian.htm#4>; Internet; accessed 21 January 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Baron Antoine-Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War*, trans. Major O.F. Winship and Lieutenant E.E. McLean (New York: Putnam, 1854); available at <http://www.usregulars.com/jomini1.html>; Internet; accessed 19 September 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Bassford, 50.

<sup>20</sup> Major Gregory R. Ebner, "Scientific Optimism: Jomini and the U.S. Army," *The U.S. Army Professional Writing Collection, Combat Studies Institute, Command and General Staff College* (July 2004); available at [http://www.army.mil/professionalwriting/volumes/volume2/july\\_2004/7\\_04\\_2\\_pf.html](http://www.army.mil/professionalwriting/volumes/volume2/july_2004/7_04_2_pf.html); Internet; accessed 21 September 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Baron Antoine-Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War*, trans. Major O.F. Winship and Lieutenant E.E. McLean (New York: Putnam, 1854); available at <http://www.usregulars.com/jomini2.html>; Internet; accessed 19 September 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Ebner, page 2 of 3.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas M. Huber, "Introduction to Lesson 8, Interpreting Modern War," *U.S. Army Command and General Staff College C600-8*; available at <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/jomini/lsn08.htm>; Internet; accessed 19 September 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> The Department of Defense Dictionary, referenced above, defines Lines of Operation as "Lines that define the directional orientation of the force in time and space in relation to the enemy. They connect the force with its base of operations and its objectives." In many recent speeches as well as in guidance to Combatant Commanders, the Secretary of Defense has broadened the concept to include those strategic focus areas (lines) along which the military and the Interagency must approach a problem in order to obtain a successful objective.

<sup>26</sup> General Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*, (New York, NY: Regan Books, 2004), 336.

<sup>27</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *Forward*, quoted in Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. /introduction by Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), vii.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 416.

<sup>29</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, translation and introduction by Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), ix.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (St. Paul, MN.: Zenith Press, 2004)

<sup>32</sup> J.A.H. Fetterman, *Really, Really Bad Theology!*; 20 July 2005; available at <http://www.dogchurch.org/scriptorium/johniejihead.html>; Internet; accessed 24 September 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Mao Zedong *On Guerilla Warfare; Chapter 1, What is Guerilla Warfare?*; available at The Mao Zedong Online Reference Library, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1937/guerrilla-warfare/ch01.htm>; Internet; accessed 24 September 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous (Mike Scheuer), *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2004), 127.

<sup>35</sup> Sun Tzu, page 149.

<sup>36</sup> Larry M. Wortzel, ed., *The Chinese Armed Forces in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Carlisle, PA: The Strategic Studies Institute, 1999), 107-108.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas M. McCready, "Learning from Sun Tzu- Mr Insights", *Military Review* (May-June 2003); available at [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0PBZ/is\\_3\\_83/ai\\_109268913](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PBZ/is_3_83/ai_109268913); Internet; accessed 24 September 2005.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*